(d) the directions issued, if any, to check the applications of the anti-national elements?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI OMAR ABDULLAH): (a) and (b) The Government has decided to decentralise the passport services and to bring these services closer to the people. Under this scheme, the passport applicants can deposit their filled passport application forms through the office of the District Magistrate/Superintendent of Police in every state throughout the country. The districts where the number of applications exceeds 10,000 per year will have dedicated District Passport Cells. The forms will be scrutinised and documents checked by the District Passport Cells and then forwarded to the Passport Office who will issue the passports. The scheme has already been launched in Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Tamil Nadu, Punjab, Sikkim and Nagaland.

(c) Since the passport application will be accepted at the district offices and sent to the concerned passport office along with the clear police verification report it is envisaged that the time taken to issue a passport will be reduced and a passport could be issued in about 4 to 5 weeks time.

(d) The police verification is designed to ensure that passports are not issued to undesirable elements. Government has strengthened scrutiny of documents submitted in support of passport applications, as well as the police verification process.

Economic Co-operation between China, India, Myanmar and Bangladesh

1227. DR. ARUN KUMAR SARMA: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government are aware of the four countries academic deliberation for economic co-operation between China, India, Myanmar and Bangladesh through CPR, New Delhi *w.e.f.* August, 1999 Kunming initiatives;

(b) whether Government propose to concretize these efforts

through formal initiative with respective Governments;

(c) if so, the details of the plans thereof; and

(d) if not, the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI OMAR ABDULLAH): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) The Government is aware of the academic deliberations for economic co-operation between China, India, Myanmar and Bangladesh. These are at a preliminary stage.

(c) and (d) Do not arise.

Nuclear Disarmament

1228. SHRI C.O. POULOSE: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state the steps Government have taken for universal nuclear disarmament in the unequal nuclear world order?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI OMAR ABDULLAH): Consistent with India's undiluted commitment to global nuclear disarmament, Government continues to support urgent commencement of multilateral negotiations aimed at elimination of nuclear weapons within a time bound phased programme. To this end, the United Nations General Assembly has adopted an annual resolution tabled by India, which calls for the Conference on Disarmament to commence negotiations in order to reach agreement on an international convention prohibiting the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons under any circumstances. India has also called on the international community to take interim practical steps that reduce the danger of nuclear war posed by the present hair-trigger alert of nuclear weapons and prevailing doctrines of first-use. Government believes that a good beginning would be to formalize a no-first use agreement internationally as a step towards de-legitimising nuclear weapons.